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February 2, 2022

Chairman Steve Cohen
Ranking Member Mike Johnson
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties
2141 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cohen and Ranking Member Johnson:

Many Americans do not know that *Lift Every Voice and Sing* was composed by James Weldon Johnson in connection with the celebration of the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln, one of our nation's greatest presidents. The hymn invites the whole human family to lift their voices in harmony in the spirit of liberty. This sentiment captures aspirations of the highest hopes, never fully realized, of the nation as it would be when it finally becomes a more perfect union. Black people were captured by the truth and power of the hymn's acknowledgement of the dark past through which we as a nation have come, as well as the blood and tears experienced in the American struggle to be free from the British crown and the tyranny of brutality against assorted sojourners in this land of constant travail. Nevertheless, the hymn keeps hope alive that all of us shadowed beneath the merciful hand of the almighty God will learn to be true to our God and true to our native land.

Assemblies around our nation of all ethnicities experience a sense of unity in spirit, in singing *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. It was in this same spirit, that Nelson Mandela insisted that South Africa so long divided by the cruelty and alienation of apartheid should begin a new day of freedom singing together both the Afrikaner anthem as well as the *Nkosi-Sikolele*, the African hymn.

As the United States petitions our Creator to bless us with a more just and prosperous future, may we humbly pledge to be mindful that it was by God's grace that our founders felt God's providential hand guiding their hearts and observances in the writing of the constitution and in the shaping of our form of government. As we continue our mission of being the leader of the freedom loving people around the world, may the singing of our national anthem the *Star-Spangled Banner* and the proposed national hymn *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, witness to our resolve to bring unity, justice, and freedom to the whole world.

Sincerely,



Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr.
Founder and CEO of Healing of the Nations Foundation